



NOAA

**NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION**
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



Onboarding

Your Guide to Retaining Your New Employees



Welcome Aboard!

Onboarding New Employees to the National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration: A Guide to Early Success

New employees that are brought in the organization in a well planned and organized manner will be:

- more successful in their jobs
- able to quickly contribute to the success of their work group
- assimilate into the culture of the department and organization

This guide helps supervisors:

- make new staff member feel welcome and less anxious
- develop positive perceptions of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the team
- understand how new employees fit in with NOAA and the department
- establish healthy working relationships with team and the new employee
- create a bond between new staff member and NOAA
- ensure understanding of the structure, culture, policies, procedures and practices of NOAA.
- instill a sense of accountability to self, team, and NOAA
- cultivate employee pride in working at NOAA
- nurture employees during their 1st year of employment



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Onboarding: What is it? What do we gain?

Onboarding is the process of integrating and acculturating new employees into the organization and providing them with the tools, resources and knowledge to become successful and productive.

Onboarding is more about getting new employees to stay for a long time than about helping them begin their employment with NOAA.

The process starts with your first interaction with the applicant and continues through the end of their first year of employment. After the selection process, onboarding is the single most critical step to ensuring the success of your hire. Skip this step and you drastically increase your odds of losing a good employee.

A significant percent of employees leave the organization in the first year. Why? They give three reasons:

- I didn't feel I fit in;
- I never got any feedback;
- I didn't get any help.

At NOAA, we want our employment strategy to be driven by mission, pride and concern for people successfully contributing to all NOAA's missions.

If we are successful:

1. All employees will know their role in helping achieve our mission; not just new employees
2. Managers and supervisors will care about all employees that contribute to the success of NOAA's mission including new employees.
3. All employees will be recognized for their efforts to:
 - a. provide excellent service
 - b. collaborate effectively within and for their team
 - c. develop themselves and their skills
 - d. show personal initiative and contribute to the team
 - e. contribute to our mission



Preparing for Onboarding

Principles for Successfully Managing New Employees in Their 1st Year

☒ **Onboarding is a process, not an event.**

It is ongoing. It starts before the new staff member arrives and continues through the first year of employment and beyond. Onboarding can be overwhelming for new staff members, even those with experience. Keep close contact to make sure things are going well.

☒ **Onboarding is a team effort.**

Get buy-in and involvement from all members of your team. Use a “buddy” or preceptor program. Many areas already do this. If yours doesn’t, create one. Remember that the new staff member also has a role and responsibility in making the onboarding a success. Partner with the Work Force Management Office’s (WFMO) service representatives, and the organization’s leaders.

☒ **Onboarding is planned and structured.**

Time invested upfront in planning onboarding activities will develop your new employee faster. The plan should be consistent and reproducible for all new staff members. Remember to mix strategies – observations, presentations, demonstrations, practice – and to be flexible enough to be able to meet individual needs. New staff members may move through the process at different speeds and in different ways. The WFMO website has tools to help you.

☒ **Onboarding is about more than filling a job.**

Make sure to include relationships and critical introductions. Introduce the new staff member to the formal and informal culture, values, and practices of the organization and of the department



Creating Expectations and Responsibilities – The Role of the Leader:

Without doubt, the direct supervisor is the most influential person in the onboarding process. The direct supervisor is key to the successful integration of new employees into the organization.

It's your role to work side-by-side with your new staff members until they learn the ropes and establish credibility within the organization. Help them thrive during the critical transition period and your efforts will pay off. Finding good employees is too difficult – and too expensive – to let one go without a fight.

Here are 7 ways you can help your new staff member make a successful transition:

1. Clarify your expectations up front.

- Even the most detailed job descriptions leave something out. You have to put your expectations in words. Tell each person what you expect of them!
- Review expectations point-by-point; make sure each new staff member understands them and are comfortable with them. If not, why hire them?
- Don't assume that a new staff member will know exactly what he/she has been hired to do. They don't! And many are not comfortable asking.

2. Don't assume that qualifications equal success.

- Just because new staff members are well-qualified doesn't mean they will easily and quickly take to their new roles at NOAA.
- Every new staff member will have strengths, but also have opportunities for improvement.
- Give positive feedback on strengths, and be on the look out for opportunities to coach through weaknesses.
- Address a performance concern the first time you see them – don't wait to see if it will happen again.

3. Spell out important points about organizational and department goals, culture, and dynamics.

- Be sure to cover “big picture” topics for NOAA and your department: mission, overall strategy, strategic plans, and especially how your department supports the organization's mission.
- Talk about the organizational & departmental culture. How do we all succeed? Be realistic when sharing this information but be positive and supportive of department, your internal customers and the organization.
- Never assume a new employee knows the basics even if he/she is coming from another department within the organization; knowledge and culture differ from department to department, as well as organization to organization.
- It's better to address culture and goal issues up front than to assume your new staff member will ask about them or pick them up through trial and error.



4. Help each new employee nurture their network.

- Introduce new employees to their key internal customers. As part of the introduction, talk about client expectations.
- Have a frank discussion about the individuals who will affect a new employee getting their job done. Emphasize relationships: direct reports, subordinates, major internal customers, organizational leadership, and others.
- Make key introductions.
- Invite the new staff member to meetings.
- Success on the job hinges on the ability to form a strong network with coworkers and customers.

5. Be honest about potential pitfalls and past mistakes.

- Learn from the past; make sure that new employees don't make the common past mistakes in your department.
- Were there new hires who did not work out well? Tell new employees what went wrong and why.
- Talk with your new staff member about possible obstacles to success (e.g., meeting client needs) and then the strategies to overcome them.

6. Hold regular assimilation reviews.

- Common wisdom says the “honeymoon period” lasts about six months; for some it's three months, for others it's a year.
- Keep in close contact with each new staff member in their 1st year.
- While you may delegate many aspects of onboarding to others, remember that your role is the primary one – talk with each employee.

7. Make coaching resources available before there is a crisis.

- Don't wait until a new staff member is in serious trouble before taking action. Be a coach.
- Know the coaching resources within your group. Who makes a good coach, buddy, preceptor, and mentor?
- A good coach:
 - Listens to what is being said
 - Helps the person understand why something didn't work as expected
 - Offers suggestions for improvement



Mission Alignment Guide and How We All Fit In: Linking NOAA Mission and Individual Staff Contribution

Creating an alignment between organization mission and the role of every employee is a basic management challenge. Every employee should understand how his or her role supports the NOAA mission. Each department and workgroup should have a written mission statement that supports NOAA's mission, making it easy to see how the department ties into and supports the overall organization; this is called cascading.

Additionally, objectives will be cascaded down throughout the organization. Managers and supervisors should be able to provide clear links between each employee's objectives and job tasks and the objectives and purpose of your department. Objectives that start at the top of the organization are more general and as they move down into specific departments and individuals, they should become more specific and operational. In the end, each individual should have objectives that link all the way back up to the corporate mission.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Mission

To understand and predict changes in Earth's environment and conserve and manage coastal and marine resources to meet our Nation's economic, social, and environmental needs.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Strategic Priorities

Ecosystem Strategies

- ☐ Engage and collaborate with our partners to achieve regional objectives by delineating regional ecosystems, forming regional ecosystem councils, and Implementing cooperative strategies to improve regional ecosystem health.
- ☐ Manage uses of ecosystems by applying scientifically sound observations, assessments, and research findings to ensure the sustainable use of resources and to balance competing uses of coastal and marine ecosystems.
- ☐ Improve resource management by advancing our understanding of ecosystems through better simulation and predictive models. Build and advance the capabilities of an ecological component of the NOAA global environmental observing system to monitor, assess, and predict national and regional ecosystem health, as well as to gather information consistent with established social and economic indicators.



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Strategic Priorities (cont.)

- ☐ Develop coordinated regional and national outreach and education efforts to improve public understanding and involvement in stewardship of coastal and marine ecosystems.
- ☐ Engage in technological and scientific exchange with our domestic and international partners to protect, restore, and manage marine resources within and beyond the Nation's borders.

Climate Strategies

- ☐ Improve the quality and quantity of climate observations, analyses, interpretation, and archiving by maintaining a consistent climate record and by improving our ability to determine why changes are taking place.
- ☐ Improve the quantification and understanding of the forces bringing about climate change by examining relevant human-induced increases in atmospheric constituents.
- ☐ Advance sub-seasonal to inter-annual climate predictions and climate change projections by improving analysis of the climate system, using ensembles of multiple, high-end climate and Earth system models.
- ☐ Develop the ability to predict the consequences of climate change on ecosystems by monitoring changes in coastal and marine ecosystems, conducting research on climate-ecosystem linkages, and incorporating climate information into physical biological models.
- ☐ Develop and contribute to routine state-of-the-science assessments of the climate system for informed decision-making.
- ☐ Work with customers in order to deliver climate services and information products involved in health, safety, environmental, economic, and community planning that increase the effective application of this information.

Weather and Water Strategies

- ☐ Improve the reliability, lead-time, and effectiveness of weather and water information and services that predict changes in environmental conditions.
- ☐ Integrate an information enterprise that incorporates all stages from research to delivery, seeks better coordination of employee skills and training, and engages customers.



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Strategic Priorities (cont.)

- ☐ Develop and infuse research results and new technologies more efficiently to improve products and services, streamline dissemination, and communicate vital information more effectively.
- ☐ Work with private industry, universities, and national and international agencies to create and leverage partnerships that foster more effective information services.
- ☐ Build a broad-based and coordinated education and outreach program by engaging individuals in continuous learning toward a greater understanding of the impacts of weather and water on their lives.
- ☐ Employ scientific and emerging technological capabilities to advance decision support services and educate stakeholders.

Commerce and Transportation Strategies

- ☐ Expand and enhance advanced technology monitoring and observing systems, such as weather and oceanographic observations, ice forecasts and nowcasts, hydrographic surveys, and precise positioning coordinates, to provide accurate, up-to-date information.
- ☐ Develop and apply new technologies, methods, and models to increase the capabilities, efficiencies, and accuracy of transportation-related products and services.
- ☐ Develop and implement sophisticated assessment and prediction techniques, products, and services to support decisions on aviation, marine, and surface navigation efficiencies; coastal resource management; and transportation system management, operations, and planning.
- ☐ Build public understanding of the science and technology involved and the role of the environment in commerce and transportation through outreach, education, and industry collaboration.

Defining the Organization and Unit Culture

In addition to feeling welcome and learning about the unit's vision, mission, and goals, the new staff member needs to have some introduction to the culture of the organization and the department.

Culture is defined as a pattern of basic assumptions that a group considers to work well enough to be valid; and because they are valid, they should be taught to new members. These assumptions are demonstrated in the *right way* to think, feel and act on the unit. The results of culture are so strong that those who follow the culture will be rewarded. Conversely, those who feel they *don't fit in* will feel alienated and alone.

Cultural introduction is imperative for employee assimilation into productive and satisfying work effectiveness. Your articulation of succeeding within the culture will help the new staff member understand the organizations and units, norms and what both truly value.

"But, how do I articulate our workgroup's culture?"

It is difficult to define and explain to a newcomer what any workgroup's culture is. But what is the choice? Leave the culture definition to chance – perhaps defined by the least competent, least committed, most negative or most dissatisfied? Or, is the choice to craft the culture message through honest discussion and articulation.

Below are some questions to ask yourself and staff on what you collectively believe the culture is. Ask these questions of staff:

1. How would you describe the environment (e.g., fun, serious, data driven, complex, etc.)?
2. What are the informal rules on the unit?
3. What does the manager like/dislike?
4. What is positive and advances us? What hinders us?
5. What does the unit value most?
6. How are decisions made? Who is involved with the process?
7. Who, outside the unit, are important stakeholders in decision making? How powerful or influential are they? What is the informal hierarchy?
8. What do you need to be successful on the unit?
9. What are you rewarded for?
10. What are lessons to teach, so new employee don't learn those lessons the hard way?
11. What are the most important three things to know about the organization?



Key Point: *This exercise can provide a snapshot of the culture for new employees. Assigned “buddies” can also assist the new staff member with understanding and working in the new culture. Buddies should believe in the culture you want to create.*

Welcome Ideas

“How should we welcome new employees to our work group?”

One way is to assume they are friends or relatives. The following can be assigned to staff members or be assigned as a team project facilitated by the leader over several sessions.

Create a “Welcoming Book.”

- Ask current staff members to write about themselves in the book.
- Include pictures and things of value and importance to them.

Create a “New Employee Support Group.”

- Establish a schedule for all new staff members to get together with a facilitator to discuss their experiences, identify successes, describe moments of pride, ask questions, etc.

Plan a “Welcome Event.”

- Put together a welcoming breakfast or lunch.
- Consider doing something at a staff meeting when staff members regularly gather together. Make it fun.

Create a “New Employee Get-to-Know-You Questionnaire.”

- Ask new staff members to profile themselves.
- Use some fun questions such as, “What is your hidden talent?” or “Who is your most admired person and why?”

Preparing a “Buddy” for Each New Employee

Integral to creating early success with every new employee is pairing each new employee with a veteran accomplished employee who is interested in helping new employees succeed – a buddy!

What is a Buddy?

A "buddy" is someone who partners with a new employee during the first year of employment to offer advice and guidance in helping foster and promote skill and professional development of a new employee. A buddy should be a superior performer and have good people skills. The buddy knows the ropes, but more importantly knows what actions to take to be successful in achieving our mission. The buddy is an effective source of advice and encouragement who can succeed in steering new employees in the right direction and helping create and maintain a positive, productive culture of excellence.

The buddy should be someone that the new staff member can trust totally. Part of this role is to allow for a comfortable, more informal environment in which the employee can ask and receive information about the department culture and norms and those everyday, mostly unwritten, procedures and policies that help to explain how things really work.

Finally, a major goal of the buddy is to establish a sense of belonging for the new employee. With an effective buddy, each new staff member will quickly become a contributing member to his or her new department. Each new employee will understand how he/she fits in, what is expected of them, and how they will succeed.

Management Responsibilities

- Select positive role models as buddies
- Ensure the buddy has time to be accessible to the new employee
- Provide the buddy with the tools needed to be an effective buddy (e.g., skills in coaching, feedback, communication)
- Monitor the buddy – employee relationship and evaluate program



Buddy Selection Criteria

- Demonstrates high performance; is a positive role model
- Is skilled in the new employee's job; is a peer
- Is proud of the organization
- Has patience and good communication and interpersonal skills
- Willingly takes on responsibilities associated with the buddy role

Buddy Responsibilities

- Be an informational resource for the new employee on policies, procedures, work rules, norms, etc.
- Provide insight, feedback, and information that support the new employee's social involvement in the department
- Assist in training the new employee
- Be a tour guide; provide introductions
- Identify resources to help the new employee

What a New Employee Expects from His or Her Buddy

- Advice, guidance, encouragement, and a positive attitude
- Shared information is kept confidential
- Honest feedback
- Help in understanding the culture of NOAA and the department
- Help in understanding how to get things done
- Assistance in building networks and relationships within the department and with clients
- Insight into how to make relationships with people effective and productive
- How to balance three forms of communication – E-mail, telephone, in-person



Tips for Buddies

- Don't worry about being perceived as the "expert." Your experience is important to the new employee. You don't have to have all the answers.
- Be patient and positive. It takes time to develop a relationship. Don't try to cover everything right away. Buddies need to allow enough time for growth.
- Don't try to force a relationship.
- Look for a preferred style of communication and/or cultural identification
- Don't try to turn the new employee into your clone. That person may have a different style from yours. Let the new employee develop.
- Listening may be more important than giving advice.
- Don't be judgmental; ask questions such as: "What do you need?" "What makes you feel that way?" "How can I help?" etc.; don't draw conclusions without exploring why someone feels or acts the way they do.
- Keep a good attitude and stay in a teaching spirit.
- Don't lose heart because of a new employee's failures. You cannot always ensure success, but you can help that person to begin again more intelligently.

Key Point: *You can help a new employee see a failed experience as valuable by honestly identifying where it went wrong. Buddies can often prevent failure from happening to a new employee a second time.*